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ABSTRACT

This report describes an after-school tutorial program in which fifth- and sixth-grade tutors at Public School 61, situated in the heart of the Lower East Side of Manhattan, New York City, tutor third and fourth graders. The Chance To Succeed Program was developed by assistant principal I. Kushner. It begins in November and ends in June, and runs for one hour after school Monday through Thursday. The first half hour is spent on homework; the second half hour is spent in independent reading or working on personal computers at language arts games or compositions. Tutoring training for the older students precedes the November start. In its first year, the program included 25 third and fourth graders and 9 tutors; later, however, it became necessary to add tutors from a nearby high school because of the demand. These high school students then served as role models for the fifth and sixth graders. The diverse ethnic backgrounds of the high school students, who were Asian, Hispanic American, and Caucasian, helped both tutors and tutored students cross racial and ethnic barriers. Responses from parents, teachers, school administrators, and students have been positive; and the standardized test scores of fourth graders soared, with an overall gain of 68%. The Chance To Succeed Program has been recognized by the school system and is being implemented in other schools. (SLD)

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Chance To Succeed

An After School Tutorial Program

By Kate Walter

A report on a project at P.S. 61, New York City, supported by the Plan For Social Excellence, Inc.

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lan For Social Excellence, Inc.

The Plan for Social Excellence, Inc. — a private foundation — came into being on March 16, 1990, through the change of name of The Lebensburger Foundation, which had been in existence since October 18, 1961. With the change of name came a change of missions, officers, and staff.

The Plan for Social Excellence has elected as its mission the bringing about of positive and measurable improvements in the areas of education and the environment. It supports projects that explore research results; evaluates and disseminates the results of such projects, and, encourages, the replication of successful projects.

The objectives of the Plan are put into effect primarily through five activities; seminars, grants, scholarships, technical assistance, and publishing. During its initial phase of activities, the Plan will concentrate on educational matters. At the appropriate time in the future, it will initiate a similar set of activities in areas related to the environment.

The officers of the Plan have elected not to limit its activities to specific geographic areas. It will make grants and provide technical assistance wherever in the United States there is an opportunity to be of help. It will also distribute its publications and disseminate information about its efforts throughout the country.

The offices of the Plan for Social Excellence, Inc. are located at 116 Radio Circle, Mount Kisco, New York, 10549. The telephone number is 914-241-8690 and the telecopier number is 914-241-7476.

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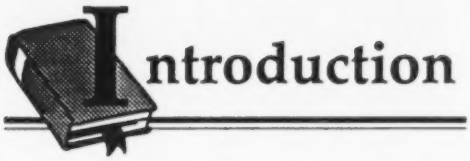

Introduction

Soon after the Plan for Social Excellence made the grant in support of the *Chance to Succeed* project, it was evident that what was happening with the students was a story that needed to be shared with others. Although it is not unusual for foundations to write reports on projects they fund, they are usually elaborate pieces written about complex and expensive projects or programs. In this instance, what is especial is that a relatively limited amount of funds and a wonderful effort by a group of caring adults and students resulted in a substantial, life-changing benefit for a group of children. This is the kind of synergy that reveals the enduring values at the heart of public education in this country. It is our hope that by sharing this story, we encourage the replication of this project.

hance To Succeed

An After School Tutorial Program

By Kate Walter

P.S. 61 sits in the heart of the Lower East Side. Its antiquated building conjures memories of past immigrant children sitting in these same desks— now occupied by a student body 90 percent Hispanic. Located on East 12th Street and Avenue B, the school's surrounding neighborhood is a mixture of tenement buildings, high-rise projects, bodegas, vacant lots, burned out shells, and well-tended community gardens.

Upon entering P.S. 61, it's apparent the school is an oasis from the area's poverty and chaos. There is almost no graffiti. Lively bulletin boards line the hallways: beautiful watercolors announce, "It's spring!" Student drawn maps offer information about various Caribbean islands; another board displays short stories the students wrote on the school's personal computers.

P.S. 61 looks like a vibrant place of learning, but its reading scores have been bad news. The results on the spring 1990 Degrees of Reading Power, DRP, reading exam indicated 70 percent of the students in grades 3-6, (the school's total population is 350), were reading below grade level. Scores had been declining for the past three years, resulting in P.S. 61 being designated as a School Under Regents Review.

When Ivan Kushner arrived at P.S. 61 in September, 1990, the enthusiastic new assistant principal brought with him many years of experience in developing peer tutoring programs in District Number One. He had little trouble selling Principal Marion Kelly on the idea of both in school and after school tutoring programs, although this would be the first time he developed an after school peer tutoring program. Kushner envisioned this enrichment program would result in significant reading and writing gains.

According to Kushner, an in school tutoring program functions as an "excellent precursor" to the after school tutoring program. The in school program at P.S. 61 works as follows: sixth graders are trained for two weeks; both six grade classes tutor the third grade classes in the building. The paraprofessional picks up the third graders and brings them to the tutoring room and the sixth graders are escorted by their teacher. Then both sixth and third grade teachers work with the remainder of their classes in smaller settings. The tutoring session lasts for half an hour; students alternate, so everyone gets to go at least three times a week.

"Too many times people think you put two kids together and it's just going to work, but the kids need a lot of support — and the training component."

From earlier experiences, Kushner knew tutors need systematic training in order to make programs run fluidly. Initial training techniques include observing the child at work, consulting with the child's teacher, and role playing. Role playing might include a lesson on how to deal with a child who refuses to do his or her assigned work. As the training process moves along, he adds instruction in the use of material and content area. Classroom teachers at P.S. 61 sat in during the in school tutor training; that way they could also work with the tutors. Tutors are supplied with checklists and logs to record what activities take place daily. (Specific lesson plans for training are contained in the manual "A Handbook for Peer Tutorial Programs" by Ivan Kushner.)

"Too many times people think you put two kids together and it's just going to work, but the kids need a lot of support — and the training component," observes Kushner. "Many schools do peer tutoring, but it's often done catch as catch can." He feels that what's needed to making it successful is some sort of district wide center or coordinator to disseminate information to teachers or administrators who want to set up this sort of program. (Some districts have this and it's tied in with City University of New York.)

Kushner's interest in peer tutoring goes back even further than his professional life. It took root when he himself was in high school and worked as a summer school and after school tutor in the same district; he moved through the tutoring ranks to become an auxiliary

teacher who trained other tutors. In fact, the administrator credits this rewarding experience with his choosing a career in education.

The assistant principal proposed an after school tutoring program that would work as follows: fifth and sixth graders become tutors and mentors for third and fourth graders. Since sixth graders have already been trained as part of the in school peer tutorial program, (part of the school's Chapter 1 reading program,) they became tutors and trainers for fifth grade tutors.

The biggest challenge was locating a funding source during a budget crunch.

The program begins in November and ends in June; it runs for one hour after school from Mondays through Thursdays. The first half hour is spent completing homework; the second half hour is comprised of independent reading or working on the personal computers, where students write compositions or play language art games. Two rooms are used in the after school program — one equipped for reading instruction; the other equipped for writing instruction. The children alternate rooms from week to week. The Chapter 1 reading room functions as the tutorial after school center. The Write-to-Read lab functions as the writing center because it is equipped with personal computers.

Kushner implements the program, orders materials, trains tutors and supervises activities. A paraprofessional, Pearl Jones, assists the tutors, acts as a liaison to the families, and runs the writing center. Materials include Barnell Loft Specific Skills materials, Steck Vaughn activity books, Scholastic My Writing Book, and various library books. Teaching machines, such as, Charlie, Little Professor and Speak and Read are also used. The budget submitted was slightly under $5,000. ($870 went for supplies; the rest was salaries for Kushner and Jones.)

Writing the proposal was the first step, but the biggest challenge was locating a funding source during a budget crunch that has forced the board to eliminate almost all after school programs in the district. In the past, Kushner had run tutoring programs with state/district grants. The assistant principal got around this current obstacle by seeking private money. "It's one of the few after school programs in the district," he notes proudly.

The *Chance to Succeed* program received funding from the Plan for Social Excellence, Inc. based in Mt. Kisco, New York. Kushner discovered this foundation when he brought his proposal to District Superintendent William Ubiñas, who put him in touch with Mario Peña of the Plan for Social Excellence, Inc. Kushner recommends using the funding sources listed in a monthly mailing from Chancellor Fernández, but he cautions it's important for teachers or administrators to first elicit the support of the district superintendent before approaching foundations.

As preparation for the after school program, the assistant principal examined his students' reading scores. All those reading below the 50th percentile got a letter sent home to their parents. Since about 75 percent of the third grade students were reading six months to a year below grade level, this was a huge list. "The response was very favorable," Kushner recalls.

Sometimes, Kushner pulled out the tutors, and showed them exactly how to use specific materials in the classroom.

Then the assistant principal visited the upper grades and spoke about the after school program. He tried to encourage sixth graders who were reading below grade level. He notes more came at the beginning, but sixth graders tend to have after school responsibilities, such as babysitting and athletic teams. Kushner maintains the after school program only needs about 8-10 reliable sixth grade tutors for it to work.

Tutor training started in early October. Sixth grade tutors received about 15 half-hour training sessions; ten of them were during the day as part of the in school program. Sometimes, Kushner pulled out the sixth grade after school tutors, brought them to his room and showed them exactly how to use specific materials in the classroom.

"I would emphasize how important they are to the program," explains Kushner. "The helping relationship teaches kids to have empathy and understanding towards younger children, how to deal with them, how to use interview techniques, and how to build up a rapport. If you can achieve that with a child, three quarters of the battle is over."

The positive correlation between the in school and after school programs became clear in that fifth grade after school tutors did not work out as well because they did not receive the in school training the sixth graders received. It was much more difficult to get them to work with the younger children; whereas, the students who are tutors during the day were much better after school tutors. The fifth grade tutors did not seem as receptive as to what to do; however, Kushner thinks it could work just as well with fifth graders, if they too received the in school training.

"When children are more involved with what's going on in the school, things like graffiti and fights fall by the wayside."

In the original plan, Kushner himself was a tutor, but it became too much for him to be in the classroom and do the administrative work. Since third grade teacher, Terence Farley was already working after school in a small math tutoring program, (funded from Principal Kelly's budget), Kushner incorporated Farley's tutees into the *Chance to Succeed* program and Farley took over the reading component, allowing Kushner to concentrate solely on administrative tasks. This change took place in December.

After some early drop-outs, the program settled into 34 students—25 third and fourth graders and 9 upper grade tutors who came regularly four days a week. At first, there were 46 tutees, which was not workable; Kushner feels that more than 16-18 students in a room is too many for an enrichment program. But there were still more tutees than tutors, so Kushner sought additional help. In February, the upper grade tutors were augmented by 12 tutors from nearby Stuyvesant High School; they came Mondays and Thursdays. This allowed the third and fourth graders to receive one-on-one instruction at least twice a week.

Kushner stresses that the benefits of peer tutoring programs are not just academic. "When children are more involved with what's going on in the school, things like graffiti and fights fall by the wayside. When they feel like it's their place, that they have more of a stake in what's happening in the building itself, many of these negative things just disappear. I really feel like the building belongs to the children —

and it's our job to install programs that make them feel positive about themselves and about wanting to be here. This should be a place where they enjoy coming."

"The younger kids are quicker to listen to someone closer to their age level, someone they look up to."

Also, the tutors can benefit as much as the trustees. If the tutor is an underachiever who missed something the first time around, he or she now has the chance to reinforce it in a non-threatening way. This concept relates back to Kushner's guiding philosophy: "He or she who teaches, learns."

"Sometimes kids who are tutors become less embarrassed about asking for help. They don't want to give the younger kids the wrong information, so they'll go to the teacher in the room who acts as a guide." Kushner says more questioning takes place during the in school program because the work is more academic.

The older elementary school students become good role models for the younger ones. When the younger kids started, they had poor study skills in terms of getting started on their homework. But when a third grader was paired up with a sixth grader with these skills, the older child got the younger one in line. The sixth grader would tell the younger child, "Take your book out, stop playing around." "The younger kids are quicker to listen to someone closer to their age level, someone they look up to and see around the building," says Kushner, "than if I were to tell them."

Yet another role model tier developed— the bright teenagers from Stuyvesant served as mentors for the fifth and sixth grade tutors. Several months into the program, Kushner sought additional tutorial help after realizing more lower grade students than upper grade students were registered.

The Peer Research Lab at the City University of New York, staffed by Dr. Frank Riessman and Dr. Audrey Gartner, was instrumental in getting the Stuyvesant students involved at P.S. 61. The lab runs training programs for high school tutors and works regularly in conjunction with high schools who have such programs in place. Using

these students was especially gratifying for Kushner, who is himself a Stuyvesant graduate; plus, the teenagers got to see a successful alumnus working in the field of education.

Unlike some of the grade school tutors who also may have benefitted academically, the high achieving Stuyvesant High School students, all juniors, found their rewards mostly at a personal and emotional level. None of them received school credits for this tutoring, and although the students will get letters of recommendation to colleges— none of them mentioned that aspect when asked about why they were doing this or what they got out of being tutors.

The efforts of the high school students, who were Chinese Filipino, East Indian, Hispanic, Caucasian, appeared to be a two-way learning street, where cultural exchanges crossed racial and ethnic barriers. The writer was most impressed by the teenagers' degree of dedication and sensitivity. Most of them referred to the tutees as "my little girl" or "my little boy." I sensed a real feeling of bonding.

"It's nice to talk to someone who perceives the world differently," says Marijo Thompson. "My kids are clever and intelligent; they really don't seem like children talking; they are wise for their ages. Sometimes, it's been hard to get here, but I've never regretted coming."

"Coming here makes me feel good about myself, says Susie Malhotra. "It's a hassle to bring myself here, if I see my friends going off to play volleyball after school; but I broke out of the temptation to do something else. And I'm not just doing this for myself. I want to see my kid."

"I love doing this," says Kathy Kuznetsov. "My kid was failing his tests and now he's passing. He likes to talk and we discuss family problems. I feel so good about helping him, I'm even thinking about becoming a teacher."

"I know my little girl is disappointed, if I can't make it," says Judith Taveras. "She likes me and I like her— I'm kinda like a big sister. She was surprised to realize I speak Spanish."

"I like working with people in general— and the kids here are less fortunate than me," says Juliana Hsu. "When my girl found out I was 17, she asked if I have any kids of my own. I was shocked to learn she has a relative my age with two children! Since I'm an only child, this gives me an idea what it would be like to have younger siblings."

"Well, I do have a little brother at home," adds Ruben Austria, "and when my kid found out about him, I think he felt jealous. That's because we get close to the kids here. We tell the kids to go to college and get a good job. Being a tutor has improved my self-esteem. It's nice to have somebody who looks up to you."

Kushner was pleased with the "nice relationship" that formed between the high school kids and the little ones. He observed the teenagers taking the children for walks around the building and explaining things to them, buying them little gifts or birthday cards. Sometimes, when the teenagers arrived, the youngsters would run up to them, grab them and kiss them. He also found the high school students were very ingenious in terms of creating materials, such as, homemade flash cards.

Being a tutor has improved my self-esteem. It's nice to have somebody who looks up to you."

"When the Asian kids arrived, some of our Hispanic kids were taken back," says Kushner, "but we hope the program shows them the similarities. Some of the older tutors are very committed to going to Stuyvesant—and they know they have to do well. Meeting these other kids makes them interested."

"It's good for my kids to see high school kids who are into success," agrees Terence Farley, the third grade teacher involved in the *Chance to Succeed* program.

Joel Weprin, the Stuyvesant faculty advisor, who has been working in programs like this for three years at various sites, states, "Most of my students are middle class kids and being a tutor gives them a feeling of responsibility and maturity because they have someone depending on them. Even though community service is essential for

getting into a good college, these students are very altruistic. There's lots of after school activities competing for their attention and they chose to come here. Programs like this can help break the cycle of poverty; it can change lives.'

The after school tutoring program also serves as a vehicle for getting parents more involved. P.S. 61 has a strong PTA and most of the active parents have children involved in the after school tutoring program. Kushner sets up monthly workshops, planned in consultation with the PTA. Topics include "Helping Your Child At Home" and "Understanding the Test Scores." Parents assist during lunch time and help staff a lending library and a multi-cultural resource center for which they recently received a $6,500 grant. Students can visit the multi-cultural resource center to borrow books to work on other projects. P.S. 61 also has a lively newsletter that goes home to parents.

"Being a tutor gives them a feeling of responsibility and maturity because they have someone depending on them."

Kushner believes parents are really happy with the program. Maria Salas, mother of a third grade boy and fourth grade girl who are both in the program, notes, "I've seen a big improvement in my son. Now he reads more at home. He had a problem in math, but he loves to come after school. He looks up to the older kids. This time my children were much more confident when they took the test. I think we will get back better results."

Aurea Calderon, mother of two girls in third and fourth grades, observes, "My third grade daughter is improving in both reading and math. She likes coming to the after school program. The tutors and the teachers really respect them. My daughter's high school tutor even gave her a birthday present."

Olga Ruiz is the mother of a fourth grade son being tutored and a fifth grade girl who is a tutor. "My son is reading with more meaning and I don't have to force him to read. Being a tutor has taught my daughter more responsibility." She also agreed with the other parents that her children were more confident when they took the standardized tests this spring.

Third grade teacher, Terence Farley, felt the program was extremely effective. "It gives children time to review the day's work and to have someone assist in the problems on a one to one. If no problems are present, the children have the opportunity to practice skills." He thinks the program should be extended another half hour from 4:00 to 4:30, (Kushner indicated this would happen next year), and it would be good if the high school kids could come four days rather than two days.

Sixth grade teacher, Diane Fay, states, "The program encourages good work habits and gives the kids the kind of individual attention they need." She too felt the program should be longer and suggested including recreational time.

Fourth grade teacher, Sandy Dareff, writes, "The one to one experience is most beneficial. I feel it helps the students clear up points by being able to ask questions they may be too shy to ask in a group." Dareff feels the program deserves more publicity and should be made available to more children.

The *Chance to Suceed* program received well-deserved recognition from the NYC Board of Education who sent several representatives to its end of term program. This was held in May in the school auditorium and was followed with a pizza party hosted by PTA mothers. Deputy Chancellor Stanley Litow, (who coincidentally had attended both P.S. 61 and Stuyvesant High), told the children he once sat in those very same seats and reminded them "you can do anything you want to do."

Principal Kelley reiterated Litow's words, using her own life as an example. She had gone through the NYC public school system, including City College, and now she is a principal. Kelly told them she was proud of their efforts, citing the fact that some students who had been in danger of being held over would be promoted. District Superintendent Ubiñas congratulated all participants as did several members of the local school board.

But the real excitement—and proof of the program's success—came with the results of the spring 1991 DRP test. The sampling of

scores from 13 fourth grade tutees showed a total gain of +171 points or +13.2 percent; a sampling of scores from 9 tutors showed a total gain of +66 points or +10.8 percent. Of all the students in the program, the overall gain on the DRP test results was +237 points or 68 percent. Kushner says these gains were "astonishing" and far surpassed what he had hoped the program could accomplish.

Of all the students in the program, the overall gain on the DRP test results was +237 points or 68 percent.

Based upon these impressive test results and the program's obvious value as a mentoring system, District Superintendent Ubiñas anticipates expanding the after school program into other schools next year. In this larger version, Kushner would act as the overall coordinator. He'd help get the programs started, order the materials, resolve the problems, have teachers run the program while he runs back and forth between the schools. This would be made possible with continued financial support from the Plan for Social Excellence, Inc.

The Plan, which desires to expand the opportunities for minority males, has been impressed by the maturity of the fifth and sixth grade tutors, who are mostly male. "The boys who are tutors really seem to enjoy it," notes Kushner. "It builds up their self-esteem, and it shows them there are opportunities in education besides teachers. They could become counselors, administrators, grant writers, community relations people— all sorts of things.

"The other nice part of this," he continues, "is that the kids being tutored will eventually have the chance to be tutors themselves. He or she will have already learned some techniques from having been tutored— and with the added training, they will be very good tutors." He also pictures the older elementary school kids coming back as tutors when they go on to junior high school.

In the upcoming difficult years, Kushner sees volunteer programs in the schools as life savers. "We don't want to lose teachers, but let's face the facts— with the budget cuts, we will need to get more people involved. There's a lot of talk about using volunteers, but it often does not get done.

Kushner believes peer tutoring has an important role to play as NYC schools mobilize to face the educational challenges of today; this includes the influx of children with special needs— second language learners, special education students, the homeless, the children of crack addicts. The use of individual tutors to befriend, comfort, and teach will help these children academically and will also combat the isolation they often feel from school. Tutoring programs allow children from poor families to have the same services a middle or upper class family can afford to hire.

Peer tutoring programs are very cost effective. They can be done during the day without any extra money.

Peer tutoring programs are very cost effective. They can be done during the day without any extra money from the district for the material and the staff. If necessary, a program can be run with materials already in place in the school, although the program will be more interesting if it provides materials the students don't see during the day.

Again, Kushner stresses the importance of a central district office; this center would help volunteer tutoring programs grow by drawing in parents, senior citizens, high school and college students who could tutor for course credit or community service. He also refers to studies that found peer tutoring produced more gains than reducing class size or lengthening the school day.

The bottom line is that the children enjoyed coming to the program or they would not have stuck with it for the year. Thirteen of the P.S. 61 students had attendance records of over 75 percent, and almost every third and fourth grader indicated they wanted to be tutored again next year or to become a tutor. Their own words, taken from the end-of-term evaluation forms, say it best:

"This program was a lot of fun. I liked it because all my friends were here. It was a very exciting program." (sixth grader)

"I like when they help us. They care if we pass and that's why I like them. If I don't know something I ask them for help." (fourth grader)

"While you are having fun, you are learning new things. And they give you some treats. The after school teachers mean a lot to me." (third grader)

"I love the program because it's fun and nice. I learn a lot of things from the Stivison (sic) kids." (third grader)

"The tutors help us kids with homework and how to read words we don't know. I like the teachers, Mr. Farley, Ms. Jones, and Mr. Kushner. They are wonderful people." (fourth grader)

"I like the after school program because it helps me do better in my school work and I meet new friends." (fourth grader)

"I like the tutoring because it was fun and it was nice of them to help us with math and reading. I will like to be a tutor because I will like to help children the way they helped me." (fourth grader)

"While you are having fun, you are learning new things. The after school teachers mean a lot to me."

Kate Walter

Kate Walter is a freelance writer with years of diversified writing/editing experience. Her works includes articles for consumer and trade magazines, arts reviews, essays, proposal, directories, guides, and curriculums. Her teaching experience spans twenty years in the fields of writing, literature and media studies in a variety of educational settings.

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